

**Regional Efficiency Subcommittee
Smart Growth Task Force
Stakeholders Forum**

**Thursday, September 4, 2008
10:00 a.m.
Room 1E, Legislative Office Building**

**Remarks on Behalf of the Capitol Region Council of Governments
Lyle Wray, Executive Director**

Chair Representatives Reynolds and Candelora and Mark Paquette:

My name is Lyle Wray and I serve as the Executive Director of the Capitol Region Council of Governments serving the 29 towns in this region. We are delighted today to have the opportunity to share some input on regional efficiency and smart growth particularly as related to shared municipal services.

We would like to offer four main points today to the Subcommittee.

1. Make incentives for towns to work together a permanent part of state law and funding
2. Adjust the criteria for shared services in law away from a 50% of towns participation preference to a more flexible, context sensitive approach of what is feasible and makes sense.
3. More appropriately fund regional planning and similar organizations to be stronger regional partners for environment, economic development as well as land use and transportation issues.
4. Consider a “go it alone” fiscal impact statement or pilot for disclosure for major capital and other spending that could be shared but that towns decide to pursue on their own.

If I might, I would like to go briefly over each of these four points and look forward to any questions that you might have.

Make incentives for towns to work together a permanent part of state law and funding. Last year more than 8 million dollars was allocated for regional performance incentive grants to assist towns to work together to product greater efficiency. Despite being in the budgets of the Governor, House and Senate this past session the decision not to reopen the budget concluded the program for the current fiscal year. An argument can be made that challenging financial times for towns are just the right time for incentives for shared services. States such as Maine, New York, New Jersey and Michigan, to name only a few, have put in place large scale shared services grant programs to towns. Some of this is contained on the CRCOG website listed at the end of these remarks.

There are several reasons to restore this funding and to make it permanent. We are in a period of fiscal constraint that offers a “teachable moment” for sharing services that might be absent in flusher financial times. Second, having a long term commitment to shared services incentives is important since there are various lifecycles of public services – for example, when communications

equipment is replaced will vary across towns and knowing that the program is there will sustain cooperative efforts over time.

CRCOG has championed Service Sharing for years as a way to help towns do more with less. Many CRCOG-led and CRCOG-managed initiatives are examples of service sharing, from the CAPTAIN police/fire data program to regional GIS. Under the OPM Service Sharing grants, we are managing 20 new projects that will both achieve real benefits AND serve as examples of how the shared approach can allow towns to do more. The projects are in every area from information technology to public works to public safety, and involve everything from sharing data to sharing facilities to sharing maintenance responsibilities. These will help provide concrete examples of how the shared services approach can work in Connecticut.

In the long time to make service sharing a reality in the long term in Connecticut, we need:

- Incentives to help towns get over the initial hurdle and take on this approach where it makes sense
- Institutions – RPOs or others – to help towns work together
- Examples that can be used as models for future service sharing efforts
- Technical assistance to help towns craft agreements and work through issues and complexities associated with service sharing.
- Evidence that the shared approach will work.

Adjust the criteria for shared services in law away from a 50% of towns participation preference to a more flexible, context sensitive approach of what is feasible and makes sense.

CRCOG very much appreciates receiving in excess of \$5 million dollars under the regional performance incentive grant program and we are diligently underway to make each of the projects attached successful to encourage further legislative and executive branch support. Several of our proposed projects were eliminated because they did not involve 50% of the 29 towns – in our case 15 of 29 towns in the project. We suggest a more flexible set of criteria based on real considerations on the ground. One of my personal favorites that was knocked out was public works equipment sharing in the Wethersfield, Rocky Hill and Newington area. Equipment sharing, as one example, is a great deal more practical in smaller clusters rather than having 29 towns trying to share a stump grinder across a very large region. We would encourage rethinking this 50% preference for projects and relying more on savings or appropriateness to the local circumstances.

More appropriately fund regional planning and similar organizations to be stronger regional partners for environment, economic development as well as land use and transportation issues.

While Connecticut abolished counties more than 40 years ago, we have rich menagerie of sub-state and almost ad hoc organizational layer with complex overlaps across public health, education, public safety, land use planning, transportation planning organizations. One strong suggestion from the Connecticut Association for Regional Councils is to suggest that state agencies such as the

Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Economic and Community Development form stronger partnerships with regional planning and related organizations and provide resources to carry out the increasingly important assignments under smart growth and other areas that the state wants to accomplish. Many of the new tasks require regional work to be successful and the current level of 10-15 cents per resident does not get us very far into planning and acting as a regional catalyst. We ask that the smart growth agenda be translated into stronger partnerships and support for regional partners as we move forward.

Consider a “go it alone” fiscal impact statement or pilot for disclosure for major capital and other spending that could be shared but that towns decide to pursue on their own.

Finally, as a personal thought, might it be an idea to pilot a financial disclosure to residents during budget time of how much a “go it alone” rather than a shared services approach costs taxpayers. For example, if a town decides to build an animal control facility on their own rather than throw in with a half dozen towns in the area, is there a way to express this as a capital cost per resident and an ongoing operating cost going into the future. Such information might dampen enthusiasm for “go it alone” services if the price tag was made more visible.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today and I would be happy to answer any questions.

References

CRCOG service sharing page. http://www.crcog.org/service_sharing/index.html

OPM Regional Performance Incentive Program Grants
Summary of CRCOG Activities

| Project Title | \$ Awarded | Number of Participating Towns | Entity Leading Project | CRCOG Contact | Town/Agency Contact |
|---|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|---|--|
| Administration and General Government | | | | | |
| Animal Control | \$ 515,000.00 | 4 | Manchester | Jennifer March-Wackers @ 522-2217 ext. 39; jwackers@crcog.org | Julian Freund, Manchester @ 647-3010; JFreund@ci.manchester.ct.us |
| Digital Health Depts | \$ 955,476.00 | 14 | CADH | Jennifer March-Wackers @ 522-2217 ext. 39; jwackers@crcog.org | Jennifer Kertanis, CADH @ 727-9874; jkertanis@cadh.org |
| Information Technology | | | | | |
| IT Application Sharing and Development | \$ 515,000.00 | 31 | CRCOG | Jocelyn Mathiasen @ 522-2217 ext. 34; jmathiasen@crcog.org | Frank DeLuca, East Hartford @ 291-7275; fdeluca@ci.east-hartford.ct.us |
| Enhancement of Regional GIS for Towns | \$ 25,000.00 | 8 | CRCOG | Erik Snowden @ 522-2217 ext. 17; esnowden@crcog.org | |
| GIS Flight and Mapping Data | \$ 357,000.00 | 23 | CRCOG | Erik Snowden @ 522-2217 ext. 17; esnowden@crcog.org | Rich Gallacher, Manchester @ 647-3062; richg@ci.manchester.ct.us / Scott Roberts, South Windsor @ 644-2511 ext. 286; roberts@southwindsor.org |
| Public Works | | | | | |
| Farmington Valley Trail Maintenance | \$ 216,300.00 | 8 | East Granby | Jennifer March-Wackers @ 522-2217 ext. 39; jwackers@crcog.org | David Kilbon, East Granby @ 508-2001; dkiilbon@hotmail.com |
| Eastern CT Trail Maintenance | \$ 185,000.00 | 10 | WINCOG | Mary Ellen Kowalewski @ 522-2217 ext. 22; mkowalewski@crcog.org | Mark Paquette, WINCOG @ 456-2221; director@wincog.org |
| Public Safety | | | | | |
| Regional Traffic Team/Accident Investigation Unit | \$ 353,290.00 | 19 | CRCOG | Karen Olson @ 522-2217 ext. 15; kolson@crcog.org | Chief Betsy Hard, Bloomfield @ 242-5501; b.hard@bloomfieldpolice.org |
| Regional Law Enforcement Data Sharing | \$ 1,292,860.00 | 32 | CRCOG | Cheryl Assis @ 522-2217 ext. 36; cassis@crcog.org | James Donnelly, New Britain @ 826-3087; JPD1119@ch.ci.new-britain.ct.us / Sergeant Andrew Jaffee, Hartford @ 757-4133; Ajaffee@hartford.gov |
| Regional Law Enforcement Training Center | \$ 1,051,101.00 | 27 | CRCOG | Cheryl Assis @ 522-2217 ext. 36; cassis@crcog.org | Chief Michael Custer, Rocky Hill @ 253-2758; mcuster@ci.rocky-hill.ct.us / Chief Richard Mulhail, Newington @ 594-6220; rmulhail@newingtonct.gov |
| Regional Emergency Operations Center | \$ 515,000.00 | 22 | CRCOG | Jennifer March-Wackers @ 522-2217 ext. 39; jwackers@crcog.org | Julian Freund, Manchester @ 647-3010; JFreund@ci.manchester.ct.us |